



CLEAN WATER ACTION

5 August 2004

Ms. Malinda Hall
Cal/EPA - Office of the Secretary
Cal/EPA EJ Program,
PO Box 2815,
Sacramento, CA, 95812

RE: Public Comments on CalEPA Draft Intra-Agency Environmental Justice Strategy

Dear Ms. Hall,

On behalf of Clean Water Action (CWA) and its 20,000 California members, we are pleased to have the opportunity to provide the following comments regarding the California Environmental Protection Agency Intra-Agency Environmental Justice Strategy (Draft, July 2004). Clean Water Action is a national environmental organization with offices throughout the country, including a California program headquartered in San Francisco. CWA's California efforts focus on the ensuring that all Californians have access to a clean, safe and healthy environment, regardless of their race, culture and socioeconomic status. We sit on the steering committee of the Environmental Justice Coalition for Water and are founding members of the Bay Area Working Group on the Precautionary Principle.

Staff of our closely allied sister organization, Clean Water Fund, submitted comments in support of CalEPA's Environmental Justice strategy in September 2003, and we would like to reiterate our endorsement of this important effort. The collective commitment and dedication of CalEPA staff and the members of the Environmental Justice Advisory Committee have led to the formation of a meaningful foundation for fulfilling environmental justice goals within its BDOs and their programs. We especially commend the continued attention given to meaningful community participation and engagement in decision-making and once implemented, the steps outlined in this document will make participation easier and more respectful to communities facing environmental injustices throughout California. **Many months of effort have been put forth into this process and we strongly urge CalEPA to adopt the Environmental Justice Strategy without delay.**

In reviewing this Draft Strategy, we were encouraged by the comprehensive approach proposed. **However, it is imperative for the final Strategy to include concrete deadlines with measurable commitments for achieving the goals and objectives put forth in the document.** A specific implementation schedule creates strong accountability mechanisms and creates incentives for both CalEPA staff and communities to continue to energize this important process. In addition, while the goal of increasing research and data collection regarding impacts to environmental justice communities is an admirable one, **CalEPA must prioritize dedicating resources toward regulatory structures and programs that have the power to generate real improvements in the health of California's communities and tribes for any of these earnest and diligent efforts will come to fruition.**

Clean Water Action strongly agrees with the report's assertion that environmental justice and economic growth are falsely portrayed as competing goals. The application of statewide environmental justice guidelines can protect communities from local decision-making that often compromises the public health needs of a community with the often-false promise of jobs and economic vitality. **For this reason, we demand that this Draft Strategy be amended to include an explicit commitment to address environmental justice through revisions to permitting practices.** Tailoring permit action thresholds and control requirements that take into account a specific community's pollution burden will provide guidance for local governments that are trying to attract new jobs and industry. And creating site-specific pollution prevention analyses could give otherwise unwelcome industries the opportunity to adjust their operations to benefit themselves and their community. This should become an important component of implementing the cumulative impacts commitment made in the Final EJ Advisory Recommendations report.

It is our sincere hope that the Governor's California Performance Review process, released to the public earlier this week, will in no way dampen or hamper the expeditious implementation of this program.

Thank you for your consideration of these comments.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Lena Brook", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Lena Brook
Interim California Director